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British Prisoners of War in Germany.

STATEMENT BY MR. TENNANT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

(May 24th, 1916.)

Major WHEELER asked whether, owing to the reported scarcity of meat and other articles of food in Germany, he can make any further statement as to the amounts of the rations supplied daily to the British prisoners of war by the German Government ?

Mr. TENNANT : I stated on the 3rd May, in reply to a supplementary question, that the authorised scale of rations for British prisoners in Germany was carried out very generously. Since then I have had further information, derived from returned prisoners. These do not, I find, confirm the statement made, but, on the contrary, show that the German scale is, in practice, disregarded with serious consequences to the prisoners. I should, therefore, like to take this opportunity of correcting my previous answer, and of stating that I am advised that, if it had not been for the parcels of food sent to the men from this country, they would in very many instances have starved. I do not, therefore, think that there should be any relaxation of the efforts which have been made, and are being made, to send relief to the prisoners. I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving me this opportunity of correcting an error which I made, and from which I had reason to fear consequences of a most undesirable kind might follow. I sincerely hope that this correction will receive the publicity it demands, and that it may be in time to avert those evil effects, which I can assure the House have caused me not a little anxiety.

Colonel BURN : May I ask the right hon. Gentleman if he does not think that the time has arrived for something to be done to the German prisoners in this country, when evidence is given by independent people as to the brutal and cruel way in which our prisoners are being treated in Germany ?

Mr. TENNANT : I have answered this question many times, and I would appeal to the House to give grave consideration to the effect which might be produced by any such course as that which the hon. Gentleman advocates. If the Germans choose to treat our prisoners in the way described, can it be argued that we should do as they do ?

Colonel BURN : Has my right hon. Friend read the report from the American Embassy people as to the treatment of some of our prisoners quite recently which appears in the papers to-day ?

Mr. TENNANT : I am not quite sure that I have seen the particular report to which my hon. and gallant Friend refers, but I have seen a great many.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir H. MEUX : Has any endeavour been made through the American Ambassador in Berlin to bring these disgraceful facts personally to the knowledge of the Kaiser, who, with one word, could stop the whole thing if he chose ?

Mr. TENNANT : I think it is desirable that that question, if answered at all, should be answered by the Foreign Office, after due notice has been given.

Mr. R. MCNEILL : Is there any guarantee that these parcels of food ever really reach our prisoners and that they are not taken by the Germans ?

Lord R. CECIL : As far as we know all parcels, or almost all, so far have reached the prisoners. The matter is one which I think ought to be regarded with grave anxiety as to what may possibly happen in the future. It is one of the matters which ought to be very carefully considered by all the Departments concerned.



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